



Candlewood Church



DECEPTION: gods with old tricks

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BIG IDEA

There are other gods, but they are not rivals nor a threat to the One True God. They are windbags of lies who lost a war waged against God's creation.

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

*"History merely repeats itself. It has all been done before. Nothing under the sun is truly new. Sometimes people say, 'Here is something new!' But actually it is old; nothing is ever truly new." **Ecclesiastes 1:9-10***
NLT

Main texts: Deuteronomy 32:17; Isaiah 44:16-17; Psalm 115:4-9; 1 Corinthians 8:4-6; 10:19-20; Acts 19:13-27; Ephesians 6:12

THIS WEEK IN A NUTSHELL

The "new" gods of our day are reruns. The Bible isn't naive about the unseen world: it speaks openly about other gods, and it calls them what they are. They are created, they are already defeated, and they always take more than they give. This week we looked at what these gods are, why worshiping them is so harmful, and how the first Christians lived in cities crowded with gods.

THE MESSAGE

The Trickiest Time of the Year

Trick-or-treating in the sixties meant popcorn balls and candied apples from the neighbors. Then the scary stories started: razor blades in apples, poisoned candy, hospitals X-raying kids' treats. Sociologist Joel Best spent decades studying "Halloween sadism" and found it was almost entirely myth. A few real tragedies got blown out of proportion, and a simple neighborhood tradition started to feel dark and dangerous.

Meanwhile, the real dangers were much closer to home. And this year, Americans will spend \$13.5 billion on Halloween, trying to recapture simpler days. The question for us: what gods are we entertaining, or even inviting, into our own lives?

Shopping for Gods in Chaotic Days

Everyone is looking for something only God can give. All through the Bible, kings and ordinary people went shopping for other gods out of crisis, envy, silence, convenience, relationships, or simple pragmatism: "It worked for them." Today it looks like anxiety, loneliness, uncertainty, or just wanting more. But the result is always the same: "Where are your gods that you made for yourself? Let them arise, if they can save you" (Jeremiah 2:28).

One: What Are These "Other" Gods?

- The Hebrew word *elohim* describes a kind of being, a spiritual being. So the Bible can speak of "God" and "the gods" without contradiction.
- But God is one of a kind: "There is none like you among the gods, O Lord" (Psalm 86:8). He isn't in a category; He is above all categories. Only One is uncreated, Creator, and worthy of worship.
- Moses tells us who the other gods are: "They offered sacrifices to demons, which are not God... to new gods only recently arrived" (Deuteronomy 32:17).
- In Job 1:6, the heavenly beings, Satan among them, have to present themselves before the Lord. God is above, beyond, and over all of them.

Two: If They're Fake, What's the Harm?

The gods are real, but their images are not. **An idol is the thing you can see, touch, and hold. A god is the one you believe is represented behind it.** Isaiah 44 pictures a man who cooks dinner with half a log and carves a god from the rest, then prays to it, "Save me." There are three harms:

1. **What stands behind it.** "These sacrifices are offered to demons, not to God" (1 Corinthians 10:20). The statue is nothing; what it represents is real.
2. **What it makes us become.** "Those who make them become like them" (Psalm 115:8). We become what we worship.
3. **What it demands.** Idols always ask for more: first gifts, then families, eventually children (Jeremiah 7:18; 19:4-5). They take more than they give.

In the end, they are "broken cisterns that can hold no water" (Jeremiah 2:13). They don't have to attack us. They just can't give us what they promised, or what we really need.

Idols always take more than they give.

Three: Paul in a City Full of Gods

- **Jesus is Lord.** In a world where Caesar was called "lord," the first Christians confessed "Jesus is Lord" (Romans 10:9). It's a reminder that the gods of this world are not our lord, savior, deliverer, or provider.
- **Ephesus: power, magic, and money.** The sons of Sceva tried to use Jesus' name like a magic formula, and it backfired (Acts 19:13-17). New believers then burned their own magic scrolls, worth a fortune, by choice. And when people stopped buying silver idols of Artemis, the silversmiths rioted. Idols are often money makers.
- **Corinth: everyday idolatry.** There, idols were woven into meals, business, and civic life. Paul's answer: "There may be so-called gods... yet for us there is one God, the Father... and one Lord, Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 8:5-6).
- **The powers named.** Ephesians 6:12 names rulers (*archē*), authorities (*exousia*), and world-rulers (*kosmokratōr*). But they rule only "this present darkness." God is *Pantokratōr*, ruler of all (Revelation 1:8), and Jesus "disarmed the spiritual rulers and authorities... by his victory over them on the cross" (Colossians 2:15).

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Nothing under the sun is truly new; the "new" gods are old tricks.
- The statue is nothing. What stands behind it is real.
- We become what we worship.
- The gods are many, small, and already defeated. The true God is one, Almighty, and He carries us (Isaiah 46:4).

REFLECTION: WHICH GOD ARE WE CARRYING?

Babylon's gods had to be loaded onto animals and carried, and they "cannot save." Israel's God says, "I have carried you since birth... I will carry you" (Isaiah 46:1-4).

1. What do I run to when life gets chaotic, crushing, or out of control?
2. What is this other god costing me?
3. Who is this other god subtly making me become?
4. Is there someone whose life makes me envious, as if "whatever they have, it seems to work"?

5. What am I afraid of that isn't real, while ignoring what's sitting with me at my own table?

THIS WEEK

- **Name it.** Write down one thing you run to before God when life gets hard. You can't let go of what you haven't named.
- **Burn your scrolls.** The Ephesians gave up their magic books by choice, because they'd met Someone better (Acts 19:19). What's one thing you could let go of this week?
- **Say it out loud.** The first Christians risked everything to say "Jesus is Lord." Start each day this week by saying it, out loud, in prayer.



DIG DEEPER NOTES



Halloween Treats and the Poisoned Candy Myth

Popular Treats, Roughly 1965-1975

Until the 1970s, trick-or-treat bags held a mix of homemade treats, fruit, and cheap packaged candy; by the end of the decade, sealed brand-name candy had mostly taken over.

- **Homemade:** popcorn balls, cookies, cupcakes, fudge, caramel and candy apples.
- **Fruit and small items:** apples, oranges, pennies or nickels, little trinkets.
- **Penny candy and packaged favorites:** candy corn, Tootsie Rolls, Bit-O-Honey, Mary Janes, Necco Wafers, Dum Dums, Smarties, Bazooka gum, candy cigarettes, wax lips and wax bottles, and later "fun size" bars.

Candy makers had marketed to trick-or-treaters since the 1950s; Mars ran a Halloween ad for Milky Way in *Life* magazine in 1954. According to the Smithsonian, by the 1970s parents had grown suspicious of homemade treats and began trusting sealed packages from recognizable brands, which ended the popcorn-ball era.

The Scare: What Actually Happened

No child has ever been shown to have been killed by a stranger's poisoned Halloween candy; the panic grew from a few real cases, unverified reports, and the 1982 Tylenol murders.

Year	Event	What it really was
1959	Fremont, California, dentist hands out candy-coated laxatives; about 30 kids get sick	A real, mean prank; no deaths
1970	<i>New York Times</i> (Oct. 28) reports razor blades could be hidden in apples and treats, citing a state health official	Unsubstantiated; likely root of the razor-blade fear
1970	Detroit: Kevin Toston, 5, dies of a heroin overdose, first blamed on Halloween candy	He found his uncle's stash; family sprinkled heroin on his candy to cover it up
1974	Pasadena, Texas: Timothy O'Bryan, 8, dies from cyanide-laced Pixy Stix	Poisoned by his own father for life insurance money; "Halloween sadism" coined the same year in <i>PTA Monthly</i>
1982	Chicago Tylenol poisonings kill 7 in late September	Unrelated to Halloween, but triggers free hospital candy X-rays, a trick-or-treat ban in Vineland, N.J., and a New Jersey jail-time law

The research: sociologist Joel Best (University of Delaware) has tracked reports since 1958 and published an update every year since the 1980s. Of about 200 reports of "Halloween sadism," nearly all fell apart, and many were hoaxes, some by kids themselves. He knows of no child killed by a stranger's poisoned candy; the only confirmed death came from inside the family.



Halloween Spending in 2026

Americans are projected to spend a total of \$13.5 billion on Halloween in 2026. This is an increase of .4 billion from 2025 at \$13.1 billion.

Average Spending Per Person

- The average expenditure per person is expected to be approximately \$115.14.

Breakdown of Spending Categories

The spending is distributed across several key categories:

Category	Estimated Spending
Costumes	\$4.4 billion
Decorations	\$4.3 billion

Category	Estimated Spending
Pet Costumes	\$920 million
Candy	\$4.1 billion
Greeting Cards	\$0.8 billion



Shopping for Gods

When Kings Went Shopping

Ahaz copies the competition (2 Kings 16:10-16; 2 Chronicles 28:22-25). Under pressure from his enemies, Ahaz visits Damascus, sees their altar, and sends the blueprints home so the priest can build a copy in Jerusalem. Then he sacrifices to Syria's gods, reasoning, "Because the gods of the kings of Syria helped them, I will sacrifice to them that they may help me." Scripture's verdict is blunt: "But they were the ruin of him and of all Israel."

Amaziah takes home the losers' gods (2 Chronicles 25:14-16). After defeating the Edomites, King Amaziah brings their gods home and starts worshiping them. A prophet asks the obvious question: "Why have you sought the gods of a people, which did not deliver their own people from your hand?" He adopted the gods of the army he had just beaten.

Ahaziah calls the wrong help line (2 Kings 1:2-4). Badly injured in a fall, King Ahaziah of Israel sends messengers to ask Baal-zebub, the god of the Philistine city of Ekron, whether he'll recover. Elijah intercepts them with a question that still stings: "Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-zebub?"

Saul consults a medium (1 Samuel 28:5-7). Facing the Philistine army, Saul is terrified, and "the LORD did not answer him." So he goes looking for a medium at Endor, a practice he had banned himself. When God is silent, we're tempted to call anyone who will pick up.

Solomon follows his heart (1 Kings 11:1-8). Solomon's slide wasn't driven by crisis but by relationships. His many foreign wives "turned away his heart after other gods," and the wisest man who ever lived built shrines for Chemosh and Molech on the hill east of Jerusalem.

Jeroboam chooses convenience (1 Kings 12:26-30). Worried his people would drift back to Jerusalem, Jeroboam sets up golden calves in Bethel and Dan and says, "You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough." A god that was easier to get to, and politically useful.

When Ordinary People Went Shopping

The golden calf (Exodus 32:1). Moses is late coming down the mountain, and the people say, "Make us gods who shall go before us... we do not know what has become of him." Delay drives them to a god they can see.

Every neighbor's god (Judges 10:6, 13-14). Israel served "the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites, and the gods of the Philistines." When trouble came, God's answer was heartbreaking: "Go and

cry out to the gods whom you have chosen; let them save you in your time of distress."

"It worked when we did it" (Jeremiah 44:15-18). After Jerusalem falls, the survivors in Egypt tell Jeremiah they'll keep burning offerings to the Queen of Heaven, because "then we had plenty of food, and prospered, and saw no disaster." They decided what was true based on what seemed to work.

Both at once (2 Kings 17:24-41). After Assyria resettles foreign peoples in Samaria, lions start attacking them. Their solution? Bring in a priest to teach them "the law of the god of the land," just in case. The result: "They feared the LORD but also served their own gods." It's the earliest picture in Scripture of adding God to the collection rather than turning to Him alone.

Even in the New Testament

"It worked for Paul" (Acts 19:13-16). In Ephesus, seven sons of a priest named Sceva try to cast out demons by saying, "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims." They treated Jesus' name like a formula that worked for someone else. The demon answers, "Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?" It doesn't go well for them.

Buying the power (Acts 8:9-24). Simon, a well-known magician in Samaria, sees the apostles' power and offers them money for it. Peter's response: "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money!"

The Pattern

Across all these stories, people go shopping for gods for the same handful of reasons:

- **Crisis:** an enemy, an injury, a famine (Ahaz, Ahaziah, Saul).
- **Envy:** it seems to be working for someone else (Ahaz, Amaziah, the sons of Sceva).
- **Silence or delay:** God isn't answering on our timetable (Saul, the golden calf).
- **Convenience:** a god that's easier, closer, or more useful (Jeroboam).
- **Relationships:** we take on the gods of the people we love (Solomon).
- **Pragmatism:** "It worked when we did it" (Jeremiah 44).

And the result is always the same. Through Jeremiah, God puts it this way: "Where are your gods that you made for yourself? Let them arise, if they can save you, in your time of trouble; for as many as your cities are your gods, O Judah" (Jeremiah 2:28).

A Different Kind of Shopper

There's one beautiful exception. Naaman, a Syrian general, comes to Israel looking for a cure for his leprosy. After he's healed, he doesn't add Israel's God to his collection. He says, "Behold, I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel" (2 Kings 5:15). He even asks to take two loads of Israel's soil home, so he

can worship the true God on it. He came shopping for a cure, and he went home with the only God worth having.



When idols first show up in the Bible

- **Before Israel existed:** Joshua 24:2 says Terah's family "served other gods" beyond the Euphrates. Ur and Harran, the family's two cities, were both centers of the moon god Sin; the connection to Terah's worship is a scholarly inference, since the text doesn't name the god.
- **First physical idols named:** Rachel steals her father Laban's *teraphim*, or household gods (Genesis 31:19). Jacob later has his household bury their foreign gods at Shechem (Genesis 35:2-4). Idolatry enters the biblical story inside the family of promise, not out among the pagans.
- **Egypt:** God judges "all the gods of Egypt" (Exodus 12:12; Numbers 33:4). The popular idea that each plague targets a specific Egyptian god (the Nile with Hapi, frogs with Heqet, and so on) is devotional tradition; label it as illustration.
- **The golden calf (Exodus 32):** Aaron calls it a "festival to the LORD." The first great idol in Israel's history wasn't a switch to another god; it was worshiping the true God on Israel's own terms. Very close to "live your own truth."

The major idols

Idol	Origin	What it promised	What it demanded	Where it led
Baal (Hadad)	Canaanite storm and fertility god	Rain, crops, fertility; survival in an agrarian world	Fertility rites; self-cutting (1 Kings 18:28); eventually children (Jeremiah 19:5)	The Judges cycle; Ahab and Jezebel; Carmel; the northern kingdom's fall
Asherah	Mother goddess, consort of El	Fertility, family, protection	Sacred poles and groves at "high places"	Manasseh put her image in the temple itself (2 Kings 21:7)
Ashtoreth / Queen of	Canaanite/Mesopotamian goddess of love and war	Prosperity and safety	Whole-family	Solomon's turning (1

Idol	Origin	What it promised	What it demanded	Where it led
Heaven (Astarte, Ishtar)			devotion: kids gather wood, fathers light fires, mothers bake cakes (Jeremiah 7:18)	Kings 11:5); Judah's refusal to repent in exile (Jeremiah 44)
Molech	Ammonite	Security, favor, possibly contact with the dead	Children "passed through the fire" (Leviticus 18:21; 2 Kings 16:3; 21:6)	Topheth in the Valley of Hinnom, whose name becomes <i>Gehenna</i>
Chemosh	National god of Moab	Victory in war	Child sacrifice in crisis (2 Kings 3:27)	Solomon built him a shrine outside Jerusalem (1 Kings 11:7)
Dagon	Philistine	National power, harvest	Temple worship, trophies of victory (Judges 16:23)	Falls face-down before the ark and breaks (1 Samuel 5:1-5)
Jeroboam's calves	Bethel and Dan	Political stability: keep people from going to Jerusalem	Self-made priests and festivals (1 Kings 12:28-33)	"The sins of Jeroboam" refrain and the northern kingdom's end (2 Kings 17:21-23)

Idol	Origin	What it promised	What it demanded	Where it led
Nehushtan	The bronze serpent God commanded (Numbers 21)	Healing, originally God's own gift	Incense, for centuries	Hezekiah smashes it (2 Kings 18:4). A good gift became a god.

Other idolatry worth knowing

- **Baal of Peor** (Numbers 25): sexual rites with Moabite women, and a plague that followed.
- **Gideon's ephod** (Judges 8:27) and **Micah's shrine** (Judges 17-18): private, homemade religion that still uses God's name. Probably the most direct Old Testament parallel to "live your own truth."
- **Tammuz and sun worship in the temple** (Ezekiel 8:14-16).
- **Nebuchadnezzar's statue** (Daniel 3): a state idol with compelled worship.
- **In the New Testament:** Mammon (Matthew 6:24); greed is idolatry (Colossians 3:5); Artemis and the economics of idolatry (Acts 19).

Patterns of Idolatry

- **The demands escalate.** First gifts, then sexuality, then children. Idols never stay satisfied. (An observation drawn across many texts, not one verse, but it holds up.)
- **Idols promised control.** Ritual was meant to manipulate outcomes: do the right thing, get rain. That is the mechanics of manifesting, 3,000 years older. Key text: Jeremiah 44:17-18, where the people argue that things went fine when they served the Queen of Heaven and fell apart when they stopped.
- **"Everyone did what was right in their own eyes"** (Judges 17:6; 21:25). Private, customized religion that still uses God's name.
- **You become what you worship.** Psalm 115:8 (also 135:18). G.K. Beale develops this in *We Become What We Worship*; it echoes the "formed vs. deformed" language from *Practicing the Way*.
- **Where it led, according to the text:** Solomon's heart turned (1 Kings 11:4), leading to a divided kingdom. The north fell to Assyria in 722 BC, with an explicit list of reasons in 2 Kings 17:7-18. Judah fell to Babylon in 586 BC, pinned largely on Manasseh (2 Kings 21:10-15; 23:26-27).
- **The demonic bridge.** Deuteronomy 32:17 and 1 Corinthians 10:19-20: an idol itself is nothing, but what stands behind it is demonic. The natural textual doorway to Sean Tobin's material and back to the Genesis 3 serpent.

Empty, replacement gods

- **Jeremiah 2:13:** broken cisterns (thesis verse candidate).

- **2 Chronicles 28:22-23:** under Assyrian pressure, Ahaz sacrifices to the gods of Damascus, reasoning that they helped Aram. Scripture's summary: they "were the ruin of him and of all Israel."
- **Isaiah 46:1-7:** Babylon's gods have to be loaded onto animals and carried, and they "cannot save." Israel's God says, "I have carried you since birth... I will carry you."
- **Isaiah 44:9-20:** a man carves a god from the same log he cooks dinner with, then prays to it, "Save me, for you are my god." The prophets' satire, but the ache in that prayer is real.
- **Psalm 115:4-8** and **Habakkuk 2:18-19:** idols that cannot speak, see, or hear.
- **Acts 17:22-23:** Paul names Athens' searching and redirects it rather than mocking it.



Different cities, different gods.

In Corinth, idolatry was mostly **social**: woven into meals, business and civic life. In Ephesus, it was about **power**: one great goddess, magic, and money.

	Corinth	Ephesus
The city	A Roman colony, re-founded in 44 BC; a cosmopolitan port with two harbors	A major Asian port and the provincial capital
The gods	Many: Aphrodite, Apollo, Asclepius (healing), Demeter, Poseidon (the Isthmian Games), and the imperial cult	One dominant goddess: Artemis "of the Ephesians," plus the imperial cult
How it showed up	Temple dinners, trade-guild banquets, and meat from sacrifices sold in the market	A world-famous temple, silver shrine souvenirs, and a thriving magic trade
Paul's issue	Can believers eat the meat or attend temple meals? (1 Corinthians 8-10)	Converts burn their magic scrolls; silversmiths riot over lost business (Acts 19)
Key text	"You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons" (1 Corinthians 10:21)	"Gods made with hands are not gods" (Acts 19:26)

Corinth: everyday idolatry

- **Pluralism:** shrines everywhere, for every need. The god of healing, the goddess of love, and the sea god of the Games were all part of normal life.
- **Meals:** Paul mentions believers "eating in an idol's temple" (1 Corinthians 8:10). Archaeologists have found dining rooms at Corinthian sanctuaries, including the sanctuary of Demeter. Temple dinners were where you celebrated, networked and did business. Saying no could cost you socially and financially.

- **The meat market:** Paul mentions the *makellon* (10:25), the meat market, and an inscription naming Corinth's market has been found. Much of the meat sold there had been sacrificed first.
- **Paul's approach:** the idol is nothing (8:4), so love for weaker believers decides what you eat. But don't sit at the demons' table (10:20-21).

Ephesus: power, magic, and money

- **Artemis of the Ephesians:** not the Greek huntress, but a powerful mother and protector goddess. Her temple, the Artemision, was one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient world, and it also functioned as a bank. The town clerk claims her image "fell from the sky" (Acts 19:35).
- **Magic:** Ephesus was famous across the ancient world for magic. The "Ephesian letters" (*Ephesia grammata*) were known as powerful magic words. When new believers burned their scrolls, worth 50,000 pieces of silver (19:19), it was a major public break.
- **Money:** Demetrius's riot was about business. "Our wealth comes from this trade" (19:25).
- **Paul's approach:** he didn't attack the temple. The town clerk admits Paul and his companions were "neither sacrilegious nor blasphemers of our goddess" (19:37). The gospel simply changed people, and the idol economy started to collapse on its own.